

Fairy: Use mosses, miniature flowers and foliage plants, fairies, toadstools, tiny houses and furniture.

Dinosaur: Make a habitat for toy dinosaurs with mosses, ferns, dinosaur kale, bark chips, and rocks.

Pizza: Grow in the shape of a pizza, with “slices” for tomatoes, peppers, herbs, onions, or any other desired pizza toppings. Use clumps of yellow marigolds or calendula for “cheese”. Leave a slice open for easy access.

Rainbow: Plant arcs of flowers in the colors of the rainbow.

Alphabet: If you have enough room, plant a garden of plants starting with every letter of the alphabet, or just grow plants starting with letters that spell out a name or word.

Zoo: Grow plants with animal names, such as lamb’s ear, catnip, bee balm, turtlehead, zebra grass, spiderwort, toad lily, hens-and-chicks, and rattlesnake master.

Flag: Plant red, white, and blue petunias or other flowers in the shape of a flag.

Tea: Grow plants that can be used for tea such as mint, lemon balm, and chamomile.

Native Plants: Grow native flowers, grasses, shrubs, and trees.

Butterfly: Grow plants that provide nectar for butterflies and leaves for caterpillars. Add some flat rocks and a shallow water source.

Memory: Use plants grown from seeds or plants given to you by friends or family. Add rocks gathered from places you have visited.

Garden Crafts

- Build and paint a bird house or bird feeder. Make bird feeders using plastic bottles and aluminum pie pans.
- Paint rocks, pots, and garden and pot markers.

- Make stepping stones. Kids can add rocks, gems, or other objects, write their name on it, and place it in their garden.
- Craft a toad house, gourd birdhouse, or a bee box for mason bees.
- Repurpose plastic milk jugs to make a watering can or plant markers.
- Make homemade chia pets using modeling clay.
- Create pot people - draw a face on a pot or cup, fill with soil, and plant grass for “hair”.
- Vegetable stamps - cut fruits and vegetables in half, dip in craft paint, and press on paper. Older kids or adults can cut designs into potato halves to use as stamps.
- Seed pictures - Gather different kinds of seeds. Draw a picture on a piece of light-colored cardboard, outline or fill in with white glue, and sprinkle or place seeds on glue. Allow to dry overnight and tap off excess.
- Dry or press flowers or leaves.
- Create garden art and bird feeders using old cups and plates.

We’ve only had space to provide brief descriptions of many of these activities. More detailed information can be found online or at your local library. There are many books available that provide ideas and instructions. This is just a starting point. Feel free to improvise and use your imagination. Kids can come up with many other fun ideas.

A Few Books to Get You Started

The Budding Gardener, by Mary B. Rein (editor)

Green Thumbs, by Laurie Carlson

Gardening Wizardry for Kids, by L. Patricia Kite

For more information on gardening please visit:
<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/state/horticulture/index.php>

or
call University of Illinois Extension
Knox County Office
309-342-5108

Other information brochures can be found online at <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/hkmw/hort.html>

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Gardening Activities for Kids



Garden Tips

from

Knox County
Master Gardeners



Gardening has much to offer children. Besides fun and fresh air, kids can learn about nature, the environment, and science and develop a sense of responsibility, nurturing, and accomplishment. Kids learn best by doing and the variety of garden-related activities is almost endless.

In a previous brochure we presented general guidelines for gardening with children. Here we give ideas for specific activities that will entertain and educate kids throughout the year.

We first give activities organized by season. This is just a general guide. For example, planting will depend on weather, plant variety, and your specific conditions and can be done in late spring or early summer. We also suggest activities that can be done indoors anytime of the year. Next are listed ideas for theme gardens. And finally we suggest some crafts that use garden materials or can be placed in the garden.

Winter

- Start an amaryllis or other fast-growing bulb.
- Purchase a living Christmas tree.
- Make a seed wreath for the birds, or decorate outdoor trees and shrubs with fruits, berries, seeds, or pine cones smeared with peanut butter and sprinkled with bird seed.
- Give children books on gardening and related topics as holiday gifts.
- Plan next year's garden - go to the library, look at catalogs, research plants.
- Order a garden catalog to be sent directly to your child.
- Make a scrapbook or collage by cutting out pictures in garden catalogs, use as a wish list.

- Force branches of pussy willow and early-spring flowering shrubs.

Spring

- Start a garden journal.
- Plant rye grass in a basket for a living Easter basket.
- Start seeds indoors using egg cartons, egg shells, muffin tins, ice cube trays or other inexpensive containers.
- Gather flowers for May baskets.
- Plant seeds in garden to form letters of child's name or other message.
- Plant a single color garden (flowers, vegetables, or a combination). For example, a garden with purple beans, cauliflower, eggplant, lettuce, peppers, radishes, lavender, and purple flowers.
- Plant an herb garden. Most herbs are durable, heat and drought tolerant, thrive in poor soil, appeal to many senses, and attract bees and butterflies.
- Help kids make their own private hide-away. Plant a sunflower or corn fort, a bean teepee, or a vine tunnel.

Summer

- Plant an extra row in the vegetable garden to donate.
- Plant a container. Use anything that holds soil and has good drainage, such as old wagons, boots, hats, baskets, dishes, or soccer or beach balls. Repurpose an unused sandbox or wading pool.
- Plant gourds. Later they can be harvested, dried, and decorated or used to make a gourd birdhouse.

- Plant a Three Sisters garden by growing corn, beans, and squash together.
- Plant state flowers or trees.
- Plant a tree or other plant to commemorate a birth or other special occasion.
- Create Jack & the Beanstalk - plant a few pole bean seeds in a container with a tall stake, place a small figure and house on the soil at the bottom and a picture of a castle or giant at the top of the stake.
- Lightly scratch child's name on pumpkin when it is small and green. It will harden and grow with the pumpkin.
- Grow a cucumber in a plastic soda bottle. Gently insert fruit with vine when cucumber first starts to develop. Make holes in bottle for ventilation and shade bottle to reduce heat buildup. You can also grow square tomatoes and melons by placing the developing fruit in a box.
- Have a weed pulling contest (with incentives).
- Have a vine race - plant different vines and see which one gets to the top of the garage or other "finish line" first.
- Make hollyhock, lima bean, cornhusk, or corncob dolls or hollyhock umbrellas.
- Visit local children's gardens, farms, or parks.

Fall

- Make a scarecrow.
- Help rake leaves.
- Start a compost pile.
- Gather leaves, nuts, pinecones, berries, grasses, seeds, branches, and other items for crafts and decorating.
- Plant spring-flowering bulbs outdoors.

- Force bulbs indoors. Force paperwhites or hyacinths in water in clear containers to observe the roots.

Anytime

- Read books about gardening (or nature, weather, bugs, frogs and toads, etc.) or literature with a garden theme.
- Garbage gardening - use a pineapple top, sweet potato, carrot or other root crop top, or avocado or citrus seed to start a plant indoors.
- Plant an indoor herb or cactus garden.
- Make a terrarium.
- Grow mushrooms.
- Start seeds or cuttings to give as gifts.
- Place a penny on soil on top of a planted bean seed. Put toothpicks around penny to hold it in place. As the seed sprouts and grows it will lift the penny up.
- Place seeds on a damp paper towel in a plastic bag. After they have sprouted tape the bag to a window and periodically turn the bag and observe the direction of root and shoot growth.
- Place carnation or celery stems in colored water. Water will be drawn up the stem and change the color of the flower or leaf. You can also split the stem and use two different water colors.
- Make seed tape or seed balls.
- Start a worm composting bin.

Theme Gardens

Chocolate: Use plants with chocolate fragrance (chocolate mint, geranium, cosmos) or chocolate colored leaves (heuchera, white snakeroot, sedge) or flowers (columbine, dahlia, nicotiana), and mulch with cocoa bean shells.